

WIC Futures Study Group (WFSG) Conference Call

Tuesday, December 1, 2015

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Introduction

The goal of the WFSG is to develop a statewide delivery system to provide effective, efficient, and high quality services to the greatest number of participants possible. The group met via conference call to receive updates from the state WIC staff and discuss a possible future of the WFSG.

The meeting was held on Tuesday, December 1, 2015. The following is a report of the meeting activities.

Participants included:

Mary Beth Frideres	OurHeadsTogether, LLC	Shawn Hinz	RiverStone Health
Kate Girard	DPHHS/WIC Director	Bill Hodges	Big Horn HD
Corrine Kyler	Financial Specialist, DPHHS/WIC	Maria Clemons(o)	Libby WIC
Denise Higgins	DPHHS/FCHB	Drenda Nieman(o)	Lewis and Clark HD
Ann Buss	DPHHS/MCH	Janet Wolfname	Northern Cheyenne
Joe Russell	Flathead HD	Diana Frick (o)	DPHHS/Home Visiting
Gillian Brown	HRDC, Lewistown	Gayle Espeseth (o)	RiverStone Health
		Barb with Gillian (o)	HRDC, Lewistown

The (o) = observer

The meeting was facilitated by Mary Beth Frideres of OurHeadsTogether, LLC.

Opening Comments

The meeting started at 11:05 a.m. Opening comments were made by Kate Girard, DPHHS WIC Director. Kate welcomed everyone to the call and thanked them for participating. After introductions, Mary Beth reviewed the agenda with the group.

WIC Updates

Kate reviewed the results of the recent Legislative Audit which takes place every 2 years. This was a thorough review of the program with good results. There were no negative findings.

Kate reviewed the results of the recent Food and Nutrition Services (Regional WIC) Monitoring Evaluation which is a comprehensive audit. There were a few nutritional findings that Kate considered minor but no serious concerns. Kate thanked RiverStone and Lewis and Clark WIC programs for allowing reviewers of their programs on site. The reviewers said that within the staff of both agencies were “some of the best CPAs ever observed.” Shawn Hinz thanked both the state for their support and helping their agency get ready for the review and Gayle Espeseth for her work onsite.

Kate said the EBT project has started this month with the vendor, Solutran. This is a big project that will be coordinated with SNAP and TANF. All questions to this point have been resolved with the vendor. The projected start of the pilot will be February, 2017 (in and around Helena, Butte and Townsend) with full implementation to roll out in May, 2017.

New WIC Staff

Kate reported to the group that all open state WIC positions have been filled and they are now fully staffed. Lacy Little was hired as Nutrition Coordinator, Mike Fields and Blair Hendricks will be replacing Mark Walker in IT. And Kelly Aughney will be “the new Bernadette” in the Administrative Program Specialist position.

WIC Grants

The state WIC program has received two USDA grants. One is for \$153,000 from USDA to support breastfeeding. WIC will cohost training with NAPA (baby-friendly hospital initiative) and will bring in national speakers and open the educational segment to other providers. The education will be presented at Fairmont Hot Springs April 26th-29th. WIC also has some funding designated for Certified Lactation Counselor (CLC) training, IBCLC exam, and other breastfeeding related training/travel.

The other grant is for \$158,000 for outreach. The money will be used to create a new participant video for local agencies to use to explain WIC benefits. WIC will also RFP a state-wide outreach campaign which will place signs on gas pumps and delivery trucks.

Additionally, the National WIC Association is working on a 3 year national outreach campaign with which Montana will participate. This will be a very comprehensive strategy nationwide to raise awareness of the program and retain current participants.

Possible New WFSG Direction

Kate gave an introduction to this topic and discussed WFSG membership. Right now, there are four members and one is leaving their WIC position. She reviewed the history of WFSG and talked about the progress that has been made and wondered what the future of the group might be. As the group has gone forward, the issues have been addressed, leaving few statewide issues to tackle. Kate wondered if this might be part of the reason that it has become difficult to get new members.

Denise Higgins recognized how the relationships in this group have helped to improve WIC services. Through discussion, she said, trust has been built. She described some big projects on the horizon in Maternal Child Health (MCH) that could benefit from input from the group and perhaps others joining the group. How effectively is the MCH block grant used across the state? Home Visiting? Title X? In the end, she said, the state wants to see good outcomes, which the WFSG has tackled. Perhaps this new direction would help to rebuild the membership of the group, she said.

Joe Russell said, conceptually, it was a good idea to consider. Shawn Hinz said there would need to be a candid discussion with AMPHO regarding who they would want to sit at the table. Joe said AMPHO has strong membership from the large eight health departments, but there are only a few medium and small health departments that participate.

Ann Buss asked that if the group were to consider the funding formula for MCH with the intent to improve outcomes, might there be interest from other counties? Shawn thought that it might bring more interest and it would open the door for additional conversations. Ann said that now was a good time due to changes on the national and state level.

Bill Hodges said that he believes that having a system of deliverables that are linked to outcomes would be better.

Ann said that is what is happening on the national level and said the question is: What type of outcomes can we reasonably expect?

The facilitator asked if the state was proposing that the WFSG evolve into a group with a broad MCH charge. Ann said it has yet to be determined – perhaps it could be the WFSG or perhaps it should be another separate group. Joe asked how much utility the WFSG has. Kate answered by saying that all of the hard work is done and she would be ok with re-thinking the group. Joe wondered if there might be a MCH committee under one umbrella with a more open charge and with more catchment with Public Health services such as asthma, the visiting nurse program, etc.

Denise said that all of those services are intertwined. She said she appreciates the leadership and dedication of the WFSG members. She asked about the Public Health Improvement Task Force (PHITF) and the relationship between what has been discussed and the task force activities. She expressed some concern that the task force may not be as good at “getting things done” as this group. She is concerned, also, about creating “a lot of small groups.”

Joe said that there are a lot of challenges and that it might be better to be organized as a committee of the PHITF. A mission could be created and tasks could be identified. The task force itself, he said, has a broader mission.

Gillian said that this group has worked through a lot of communication issues and is now working well. She wondered if this group should be dissolved and a new group be established. Kate said that the WFSG works on issues with local agencies, regionalization, and tribal access. She cautions that WIC still needs statewide representation or WIC voices might get lost. She thinks that the group being discussed should recruit “all voices.”

Joe said the WIC Funding Formula and EBT are 2 things that keep him wanting to participate in the WFSG and Shawn said that one of the most important things has been building a relationship with state staff.

The facilitator asked if anyone on the call did not like the idea being discussed. No one responded.

Joe noted that there are no mid-sized local health department representatives on the WFSG. Kate said there are now bi-monthly conference calls with local WIC staff and one face-to-face meeting planned annually. EBT will create more opportunity for insight from locals. Some WFSG representatives do not work in WIC clinics, she added. She said she thinks there will be ways to still review the funding formula.

Denise asked the group to think it over. The facilitator asked the group to review the idea with their co-workers and get back to the state with any comments about how it couldn't or shouldn't be done.

The state will review all feedback and work out a plan to bring people together to discuss this more.

Feedback on Call

Mary Beth asked individuals of the group to give feedback on whether this conference call mode worked for the issues discussed. All were polled and all replied in the affirmative.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12 p.m.